

Food safety dept to identify ‘clean street food hubs’

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Trichy: Wondering where to buy or eat clean and safe street food in the city? The general public may get a better idea in the near future if the district food safety department’s efforts to identify “clean street food hubs” in Trichy become a reality.

Officials from the food safety department said they will start identifying the zones which have 50 or more street food stalls within Trichy that serve popular local or regional cuisine and assess them based on certain benchmarks. If the street food hubs/ clusters meet 80% of the benchmarks specified, they would be declared as “clean street food hubs” and also given awards, plaque and certification. The programme to be launched this month is being taken up as part of a national campaign.

Street food is something very popular among many people, but often there is lot of scepticism or criticism regarding the quality of preparation or hygiene at the stalls and kiosks. As a result, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) had earlier launched a massive campaign called “clean street food hub” programme to identify and officially certify popular street food hubs in the country. In September, FSSAI had declared a lake area called Kankaria in Ahmedabad as the country’s first clean street food hub.

Speaking on how the department would zero in on potential hubs in the city, designated officer (DO) of district food safety department, Trichy, Dr R Chitra said that they would initially focus on conducting awareness drives. Two such awareness drives – where the roadside stall owners and vendors from across the city would be invited – are to be organised at Gandhi market and Thiruverumbur this month. “During these events, it will be explained to the owners how a street food stall should be maintained, the dos and don’ts etc. We will give them time to improve their stalls,” the DO said. She added that inspections at the identified zones would be made after that and if a particular hub/ cluster was found to satisfy the prescribed benchmarks, it would be certified officially.

According to sources in the food safety department, there were about 350 to 400 registered street food shops within the city limits and close to 600 which were yet to get registered. However, sources said that absence of street food hubs in Trichy and lack of cooperation in maintaining hygiene among the stall owners could possibly prove to be obstacles for certification. "Street food hubs are found primarily in central bus stand area, Chathiram bus stand, Big Bazaar street, NSB road etc., but only the central bus stand area looks to be a potential cluster," a source from the department told TOI. The central bus stand cluster which had around 70 street food stalls was more cooperative with the food safety department, the source added.